THE THREEPENNY REVIEW

Red Riding Hood: Variations
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Source: *The Threepenny Review*, No. 34 (Summer, 1988), p. 31
Published by: Threepenny Review
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4383688
Accessed: 21/06/2014 15:22

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the light of that forgiveness, that because of it I am obliged to do something worthy.

A muddled expression of this came out over dinner. My father shook his head. "God knows, we've all done things we regret, things that ended up hurting people, though we didn't intend it."

This was the first time he had alluded to—that. Earlier he had told me: "I'm not offering this as an excuse, but the truth is, I never went out looking for it. Women always came after me. Especially once your mother died. Maybe you'll find it hard to believe, but women threw themselves at me—even the young ones."

Nothing hard to believe about that. My father is lavish with his wealth, and, on a man, our face is striking.

I brought up Dorsey, now living in San Diego with someone she hopes to marry.

My father sighed. "I miss her. But an old goat like me doesn't expect to keep a girl like that for long. And Dorsey was always honest, I have to say. She never promised to stay with me. On the contrary, she warned me from the start: as soon as she found someone she thought she could settle down with, she'd be gone. She wanted to have her first child by the time she was thirty." He took a sip of champagne, and when he spoke again his voice was plaintive. "Speaking of age, how does it feel to be thirty-five? Not too terribly old, I hope?"

Only later, when I was alone and getting ready for bed, did I understand why, when he asked me this, my father had struck that odd note. He must have been thinking about my mother. He must have been remembering the summer of the hats, the summer she decided she was no longer young, and that her life was over. She was thirty-two.

Glancing out the window, I see that my father is gone. My breath catches—until I hear the rattle of the wheelbarrow and spy him turning the corner of the house, back from the compost heap.

I do not think that I will ever have a family of my own. When I look into the future, I see myself living much as I do now, alone, in a small apartment in a big city, like Boston or New York. Summers, I will be here. Arriving at the house for the first time each season, I will light a fire in the hearth, even if the day is scalding, to absorb every last trace of damp and chill. □

Letters to the Editor

January 8, 1988

Didn't you think Bob Hass's piece was the very best account of Chekhov there has been in English?

Richard Howard
New York, New York

January 26, 1988

I think *The Threepenny Review* is a wonderful magazine! I'm embarrassed to say that I just recently discovered it. If #32 is at all representative of the passion, intelligence, and sheer thought-provokingness of other issues I will have to work my way backwards as well as forwards. Enclosed is a check for a subscription to begin, please, with #33.

I loved your essay on commercials, thought Robert Hass on Chekhov was very revealing, as well as helpful to me as a writer: I ended up copying out some of it in my journal. Berger, as always, was challenging and contradictory and I loved fuming at Paul Lake's article on the "new formalists." I think he's dead wrong (except about how lousy Leithauser is as a poet), but the essay made me think about poetry and why I write it as I do (I've been a poet for 20 years) in a way no other essay has in a long long time. I could go on, not a boring piece in the whole issue, but you get the idea!

Jim Moore
Minneapolis, Minnesota

February 21, 1988

I am looking forward to the Spring issue of *Threepenny*. Of particular interest to me in the last issue was Lake's article on the young formalists. I have read equally heated arguments *against* formalism in other journals that promote Olson-inspired poetics. The rancor and bitterness between different schools never ceases to amaze me; I am thrilled when I come across quality writing, whatever the particular orientation, e.g., Jorie Graham's *The End of Beauty* (language of consciousness) and Sharon Olds' *The Gold Cell* (language of autobiography/confession). I appreciate the forum of ideas your pages help make available.

Scott Bowdan
Los Angeles, California

Red Riding Hood: Variations

We always knew the old
were deadly, too close to the edge
for fear. And why else are offspring
here but to be eaten, their little bodies
a scrap of borrowed time? Grandmother
never left. When the wolf came,
he found nothing in himself
that could match her.

A woman and a wolf alone
grow similar. The wolf gains
femininity in his completed motions,
circular and smooth. The woman, in her
wariness, becomes like the animal
that kills. She moves slowly,
knowing how her own nature
must accuse her.

If the world seems rough,
miscast in its elements, believe
it: We were not all meant to be
together. There should have been a world
for the wolves, each one privileged
to die by wolf, stopped by what
is like himself, and better.
We do not deserve this.

We learn young
how man and animal may become
one. Both creatures gain and lose
in this. Man learns to move in his body
as if it alone meant salvation.
The wolf learns how to kill
like a man: thoughtfully,
often out of love.

So you walk alone
through a wood. Black
leaves stir like a child's
cut-outs. You believe in the wolf,
maybe not as beast, but as ordering
principle. Knowing night springs
from a dark throat, white
teeth glinting.

Grandmother had her own
reasons for the warning. Past
spring herself, past all matters
concluded, body to body, by the flesh,
she forgot how the young love danger,
and its pulse. The child dreamed
of the hurt man, not the hunger
of the wolf.

The wolf leaves pawprints
in snow. Villagers gather. Their
children absorb their outrage: "There
are no more wolves." One swears
it is Judgment Day, coming in
like the last, gray timber
wolf: forgotten, murderous.

—*Suzanne Paola*

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